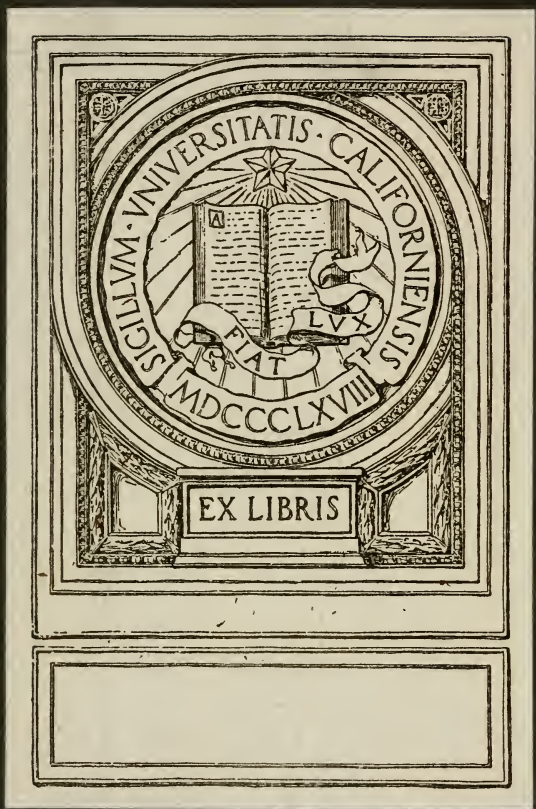


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THE STATE LIBRARY

BY

J. I. WYER, JR.

PREPRINT OF
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CHAPTER III

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III

THE STATE LIBRARY

J. I. WYER, JR.

The New York State Library

This chapter was planned to treat of the government library as a type. The work of the Library of Congress, the chief example of the type, seemed, however, to call for a separate account (chap. ii). Therefore the present chapter will discuss the state library.

The exact nature and business of the state library should by now be pretty well fixed, its aim and work pretty definitely settled both in concept and in current practice in those libraries which may be considered typical.

The American Library Association has been discussing these things among others for nearly forty years, the National Association of State Libraries for fifteen years, in an effort to determine the place and function of the state library. During this time, the library movement has grown greatly in volume and extent; its work has differentiated sharply, and certain pronounced types of libraries have been developed, each taking for its province a certain part of the ever more highly specialized work. Of these types the state library is one. For the present purpose the term state library will not mean any library owned by the state, for this in different states would include the libraries of the state universities, state historical societies, normal schools, and the charitable and penal institutions, which are themselves of other distinct types, as school, college, or special libraries, and are described in other chapters of this Manual.

By state library is here meant only that one library in each state which is thus specifically termed; which is located in the capital city, usually in the capitol building, and which serves

the government, the people, and the library interests of the state as distinguished from any lesser or more restricted constituency.

In this sense, the state library is part of the official equipment of every American commonwealth. The earliest were those of Pennsylvania and New Jersey established in 1796, of Ohio in 1817, of New York in 1818. In most states admitted to the Union since 1800, the library was established very soon after admission; in many of them territorial libraries existed for some years before statehood.

In seeking for the province of the state library, we find that in each state it is usually formally defined by law, but it is clear at once that these earlier notions of this province would today appear narrow and inadequate. From the thought of a library, usually a law library, chiefly or solely designed for the state's official family, the legislature, courts, administrative departments, and officers—in brief, for state employees—the conception latterly and in many states has grown to mean a library which, without dropping any of its original duties, shall hold much the same relation to all library endeavor in the state as the Department of Education or Public Instruction holds toward all educational endeavor. Besides the functions of advice, inspection, organization, extension, and supervision which this comparison suggests, the state library should supplement all other libraries by serving as a central collection ready to send to any part of the state the unusual books that local libraries cannot supply.

In this quest of the true province of the state library may we not with assurance and for convenience set down a few points which discussion and experience have settled and upon which both theory and practice are by now agreed?

First: A state-wide service. In 1818 the act founding the New York State Library read that it should be "a public library for the use of the government and of the people of the state."

If we are tempted to feel that the legislature then took refuge in a good-sounding phrase, with no far vision or full perception of its wide implications, we can at least be very sure that as, not New York alone, but other states as well have steadily advanced to the literal fulfilment of that early and prophetic program there have been hearty assent to, and approval of, every effort to realize the ideal which is the present conception of the state library. The founders of our early state libraries would doubtless be very much astonished could they return and see today the stature to which have grown the tiny library infants to which their early laws gave birth, yet it is hard to believe that this growth, this extension of its functions and interests to embrace the book-thirsty of the whole state, would evoke from them anything but hearty approval for the wisdom which has, in response to new conditions and new needs, so greatly expanded their original conception of the state library.

The state-wide conception is now the popular and accepted one. The burden of proof rests heavily upon the conservative or obstinate state library management which still clings to the antiquated idea of service to the state's official family only. Such a library today is likely to be awakened rudely by legislative resolution seeking to know why such or such a line of work notably performed in other states is neglected locally, or by mandatory statute establishing new work in charge of other agencies more willing and alert. If there be one sure trait of modern state library conduct, confirmed by popular approval and sanctioned by liberal money grants, it is this conception of state-wide service and obligation. If there are states where the state library still clings to the old idea, where a collection wholly or chiefly of law books is held sacred to the exclusive and infrequent use of courts, legislature, or state officials; states where the library still is waiting in dignified aloofness for the few privileged people to come to it, whose custodians have never moved to carry the library to the people—of such

it may be said that they are out of touch with current library progress, ignoring wonderful potential possibilities and inviting themselves and their libraries to a place in the rear of the procession.

Second: A single agency for all state library activities. Are we not agreed fully on this? I hope and believe so, although agreement is of later date than on the first proposition. Let us state the thesis in some detail. At the state library should be centered all library work done in the state's name. In addition to the duties of advice, inspection, extension, supervision, and circulation mentioned above, it is appropriate for the state library to distribute the state's public documents to schools, colleges, and other libraries; to allot and distribute its library grants and subsidies; to give library instruction; to maintain traveling libraries; to aid in the selection and purchase of books; to compile and print useful aids to library administration, bibliographies, reference lists, and historical monographs; to do reference and bibliographic work by mail, telegraph, and telephone; to carry on legislative reference work; to collect, preserve, and publish the manuscript records of the state or any of its political divisions—all these and other functions now admittedly appropriate, nay necessary, in any state should be combined in, and carried out by, one agency, the state library. This is no longer an ideal, for it is realized in several states, notably in New York and California, and the trend of library co-ordination sets strongly this way. That it is not realized in more states is because the functions which should have been conserved in one and only one state library office are too often dissipated and delegated to more than one, often to several, libraries, boards, or commissions.

In central and western states where the state library is small and indifferent and a strong state university has developed a larger library completely administered, it may be better, especially where the university is in the capital city, for library

instruction to be done at the university, which might also more efficiently conduct certain forms of library inspection and extension. In most states, too, the university library better than any other is able to handle highly specialized reference work. Most college or university libraries, however, are restricted as to outside loans and work by primary obligations to their immediate constituencies.

There are states with a state library and a library commission; with a state library and two library commissions; with a state library, a library commission, and a state historical society library. There are states with a state library, the obvious and logical center for all library activities, where the usual duties which should be performed by such a central library office have been divided among other departments, boards, and offices, not only with inevitable wasteful duplication, but, worse still, with no opportunities to perfect that one close-knit organization which shall seize every chance for effective co-ordination, and for the weaving of a single firm library fabric.

It is interesting to note the reasons for this uneconomic multiplication of the state's library agencies. The root of it lies in the old, original idea of the narrow function of the state library, and beyond this, rather a logical result of it, the political control and management of the state library.

This political connection put place-hunters in our state libraries, men who in many cases (though not in all, for there were eminent and honorable exceptions) were looking for the fewest books for the fewest people with the least work. To such men, library extension was repugnant. When the library commission movement began in the early nineties most of the state libraries and their custodians were either indifferent or actively opposed to undertaking this new work of stirring people up to want something they never had heard of, and they did not want the library commission attached to the state

library any more than the pioneers themselves of library commission work wanted it there.

As a result a movement took place to create other and new agencies apart from the state libraries, which the pioneers in library extension were either unable to interest or feared to intrust with the new work, and consequently there has grown up this multiplication of agencies which we now deplore.

Before any central library office (and it should be called the state library) can do the utmost to co-ordinate and advance library interests in any state, it must have the field to itself.

Third: The recognition of library work as an expert and highly specialized service. This recognition is neither so cordial nor so widespread as could be wished, yet there has been a decided movement of public opinion in this direction and a very palpable and substantial progress can be cited as having marked the past thirty years. These comforting statements can be supported by a glance at some of the changes that have marked the administrative status and legal control of state libraries. There is a puzzling variety of methods for governing state libraries. There seems never to have been any doubt as to the need for such an institution, but great uncertainty as to what to do with it and just where to attach it to the governmental machinery. It seems to have been variously regarded as an annex to the courts, a separate but unclassified institution, and an educational appurtenance, with a stubbornly persistent tendency to regard it, under any of these forms, as legitimate political spoil. Yet if we study carefully such changes as have been made in the mode of governing state libraries it is apparent that they have almost always emphasized its specialized service and have tended to classify it more and more definitely with educational agencies; e.g., in 1844 the control of the New York State Library was taken from an ex-officiis board of political officers and lodged with the regents of the University of the State of New York. The result was that while there were five

librarians in the first twenty-six years of political control, there have been only six during the seventy years of control by the university. In Oregon last year the government of the state library was taken from the supreme court and placed with the library commission. These salutary changes are merely typical of many which might be cited. They result in a worthier and more dignified public estimate of the state library and its work, an undisturbed and increased length of service for the librarians with an accompanying continuity of administration which affects favorably the work of the library.

This recognition of library work as an expert and specialized service is most noticeable in the growing tendency in state and government libraries to choose librarians *for* librarians. The conspicuous example was the calling of Dr. Herbert Putnam from the Boston public library to the Library of Congress, the first recognition of professional experience in an appointment to this position. The latest appointments of state librarians in Massachusetts, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York are other encouraging cases in point. Each such appointment, when justified by its fruits, fixes a sound precedent and establishes a wholesome principle whose effect on future appointments is cumulative though, alas, not always controlling. Despite the marked and substantial advance in this very important matter, in too many states, while men (and sometimes women) of character and standing are frequently appointed, the controlling considerations are social, political, or personal, instead of professional. That earnest, active, and personally admirable men are often thus appointed neither mitigates the reproach nor makes impropriety proper.

There have recently been two flagrantly political appointments. In each case, the men turned out were originally appointed in the same objectionable way and were without professional fitness or achievement, but against neither were any charges made nor any fault found and each had behind

him fifteen years of honest and useful service, marked by notable library growth and achievement. There is no valid reason for turning out such men. Even if their successors had been men of pre-eminent professional standing, it would have been only a good excuse, not a good reason. The same strictures hold against the "beauty" contests which have marked the choice of state librarians in some of the southern states.¹ All such criteria and ideals are wrong. The library development and shepherding of a commonwealth is work which latterly has assumed a definiteness and scope heretofore unknown, which mark it as highly specialized endeavor requiring for its proper conduct a large measure of sympathy with educational work and pertinent experience.

The director of a state library should be chosen with the same care and from many of the same motives that govern the choice of the president of the state university, or any college. Political, personal, or denominational considerations have no proper part in it nor is there any sound reason why search for the best person should not be carried to any distance, although New York is probably the only state that has ever appointed a non-resident as state librarian purely on the very proper grounds of high personal character and distinguished professional achievement.²

In practice, however, the methods of appointment of the librarian are as various as the ways by which the library is governed, ranging from popular election in Nevada and election by the legislature or supreme court in several states, to appointment, usually by the governor, by the governing board of the library, or (in Louisiana and Rhode Island) by the secretary of state.

It is hard to devise a method of appointment which shall surely recognize fitness, pertinent education, and experience

¹ *Library Journal* 23:62 and 33:101.

² The reference is to the appointment of Mr. E. H. Anderson in 1905.

more than personal and political considerations. The best results in the past seem to have come from lodging the power of appointment with a special library board most of whose members serve *ex officio* and are connected with the educational institutions or work of the state, the others appointed by the governor for long terms, or with that board or body which has administrative direction of the state's educational activities. The objection to control by the supreme court is that the library is distinctly a subordinate or incidental matter and the chief or sole interest of such a governing board is usually the law library which is but a small part of the varied work which awaits the modern state library. More objectionable still is it to have the clerk of the court, the secretary of state, or some other political official named by law as *ex officio* state librarian. Too much importance, however, must not be attached to the precise way in which state libraries are governed or their librarians appointed. When the nature of their work comes to be more explicitly recognized, as public opinion is quicker and more insistent to acknowledge it as expert service, as organized professional sentiment becomes more active and influential, it will matter less and less just what is the actual method or machinery of appointment.

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After their own annual or biennial reports, the *Papers and Proceedings* of the National Association of State Libraries are the most important sources of information about state libraries. It seems worth while, therefore, to indicate with some particularity the bibliographic vicissitudes of their publication. The following data are arranged by successive annual meetings from 1 to 17.

1. Washington, D.C., November 16-18, 1898.
Summary in L.J. 23:668-69; never published in full.
2. Indianapolis, Ind., October 24-26, 1899.
Summary in L.J. 24:623-25; never published in full.

3. Harrisburg, Pa., November 20-22, 1900.
Full *Proceedings* in P.L. 6:17-45.
Summary in L.J. 25:739-41; never published separately.
4. Waukesha, Wis., July 5, 1901.
5. Magnolia, Mass., June 18, 1902.
6. Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 24-26, 1903.
Summary in L.J. 28:608-14; P.L. 8:371-80.
7. St. Louis, Mo., October 18-19, 1904.
Summary in L.J. 29:C254-58; P.L. 10:26-30.
Full *Proceedings and Addresses* for meetings 4-7 appear only in separate pamphlets issued annually by the Association.
8. Portland, Ore., July 5-6, 1905.
Full *Proceedings and Addresses* appear in separate pamphlet and in L.J. 30:C225-52.
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Proceedings and Addresses appear only in separate pamphlet.
10. Asheville, N.C., May 24-28, 1907.
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Full *Proceedings and Addresses* appear in separate pamphlet and in A.L.A. Bulletin 2:260-304.
12. Bretton Woods, N.H., July 1-2, 1909.
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15. Ottawa, Canada, June 26-July 2, 1912.
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16. Kaaterskill, N.Y., June 23-29, 1913.
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AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
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- A.L.A. Catalog, 1904-11. Edited by Elva L. Bascom. Cloth, \$1.50, postpaid.
- Guide to reference books. Edited by Alice B. Kroeger. Revised and enlarged edition. Cloth, \$1.50 (postage, 11 cents).
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